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# Pastoral Care in Times of Crisis and Challenge For Religious Professionals and Lay Pastoral Care Providers

Rev. David Pyle

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# We Need One Another by George Odell

We need one another when we mourn and would be comforted... when we are in trouble and afraid... when we despair, in temptation, and need to be recalled to our best selves again.

We need one another when we would accomplish some great purpose, and cannot do it alone... in the hour of our successes, when we look for someone to share our triumphs [and] in the hour of our defeat when with encouragement we might endure and stand again.

We need one another when we come to die, and would have gentle hands prepare us for the journey. All our lives we are in need, and others are in need of us.



# Purpose of this Webinar

- To explore the emotional, spiritual, professional, and communal needs of Religious Professionals and Lay Pastoral Care Providers during congregational crisis, community crisis, trauma, and conflict
- To name the ways in which Religious Professionals and Lay Pastoral Care Providers prepare for times of crisis, trauma, and conflict in congregations
- To understand how to engage with Pastoral Needs during a congregational crisis, trauma, and conflict at the levels of I, Thou, and We
- To have a framework for engaging the congregation in constructive Pastoral Care during a congregational crisis or community crisis
- To allow for a natural progression from Pastoral Care to Conflict Engagement through a congregational crisis, when needed





# Notes For This Webinar

## Within the Webinar

- While we can engage and ask questions as we go along questions may be asked in the chat
- For some, the ideas in this webinar will be refresher for you, and for others it may be new
- Some of the features of Zoom (like the ability to chat with anyone other than the host) have been disabled for safety.

## After the Webinar

- If there are questions that are more specific than this webinar can engage, please contact [dpyle@uua.org](mailto:dpyle@uua.org)
- The MidAmerica Regional Staff is available for coaching during times to crisis, trauma, and conflict
- These slides are designed to be “notes”, and they will be sent out to all who registered





# At the Intersection of Trauma, Grief, Crisis, and Pastoral Care

- A traumatic national experience, such as a world-wide pandemic, can itself be a traumatizing event, even for those who do not contract the disease
- People experience secondary trauma through having empathy for the experiences of others
- Previous traumatic experiences in someone's life can be activated by the experience of a very different kind of traumatic experience, even if experienced only secondarily
- Grief and mourning can work in a similar way... a loss that inspires grief can activate grief for all other experiences of loss in one's life
- Pastoral Care providers may find the need provide care for those experiencing activated trauma and grief that does not directly relate to the primary traumatic or grief experience of the crisis





# What is a Congregational Crisis, Trauma, or Conflict?

- A national event that challenges the values of our faith or creates significant dislocation of congregants
- The unexpected deaths of those connected to the congregation by violence, trauma, or suicide
- A congregational conflict where a side believes they cannot remain in community
- Significant accidental or intentional destruction of church property
- An act of violence within the church
- An existential financial challenge
- Misconduct by a Religious Professional or a trusted lay-leader
- A trauma in your local community which affects those connected to the congregation
- A situation where a significant number of those connected to the congregation feel that the congregation has violated its values
- ???????



# Levels of Congregational Crisis Response

## I – Thou – We

I ...

- What do I need to do to remain centered and present as a Religious Professional or Lay Pastoral Care Provider amidst this congregational crisis?
- Am I capable of remaining centered and present as a Religious Professional or Lay Pastoral Care Provider amidst this crisis?
- Who are my supports in remaining centered and present amidst this congregational crisis?
- To whom am I accountable to help me remain centered and present amidst this congregational crisis?

**“The  
Divine  
Light  
In Me  
Bows  
To The  
Divine  
Light  
In You.”**

~ The Fresh Quotes ~



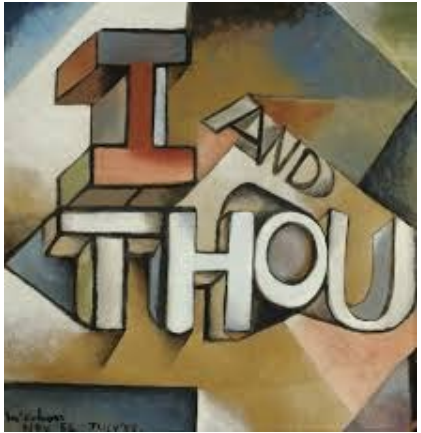


# Levels of Congregational Crisis Response

## I – Thou – We

### Thou ...

- How do I listen and be present to each person individually through this congregational or community crisis?
- How does using virtual technology change how I can listen?
- How can I help draw out each person's individual experience and feelings, while not interjecting or privileging my own?
- What do I do when I feel my own emotions and feelings reacting to someone else's?
- How do I interact with my fellow Pastoral Care Providers in providing a unified response in working with individuals?





# Levels of Congregational Crisis Response

## I – Thou – We

We ...

- How can these stories and experiences come back into community?
- How can ritual and worship address our shared needs?
- How do we help members of the congregation hear one another?
- How are we helping each other be willing to open up to another's truth?
- In what ways are we changed as a community by our shared experiences?
- How do we enlarge the “we” to include all in need in this crisis?





**WE BEGIN WITH I**

**HOW DO I REMAIN  
CENTERED AND PRESENT?**



# The Practice of Bearing Witness, to yourself and others

- Recognize the “Hook”
- Feel the Energy
- Conscious Breathing / Activist Breathing
- “Lean In” to the Energy
- Accept the Charge





# WHAT HOOKS US?

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# The Power of Breathing – And Why it Works

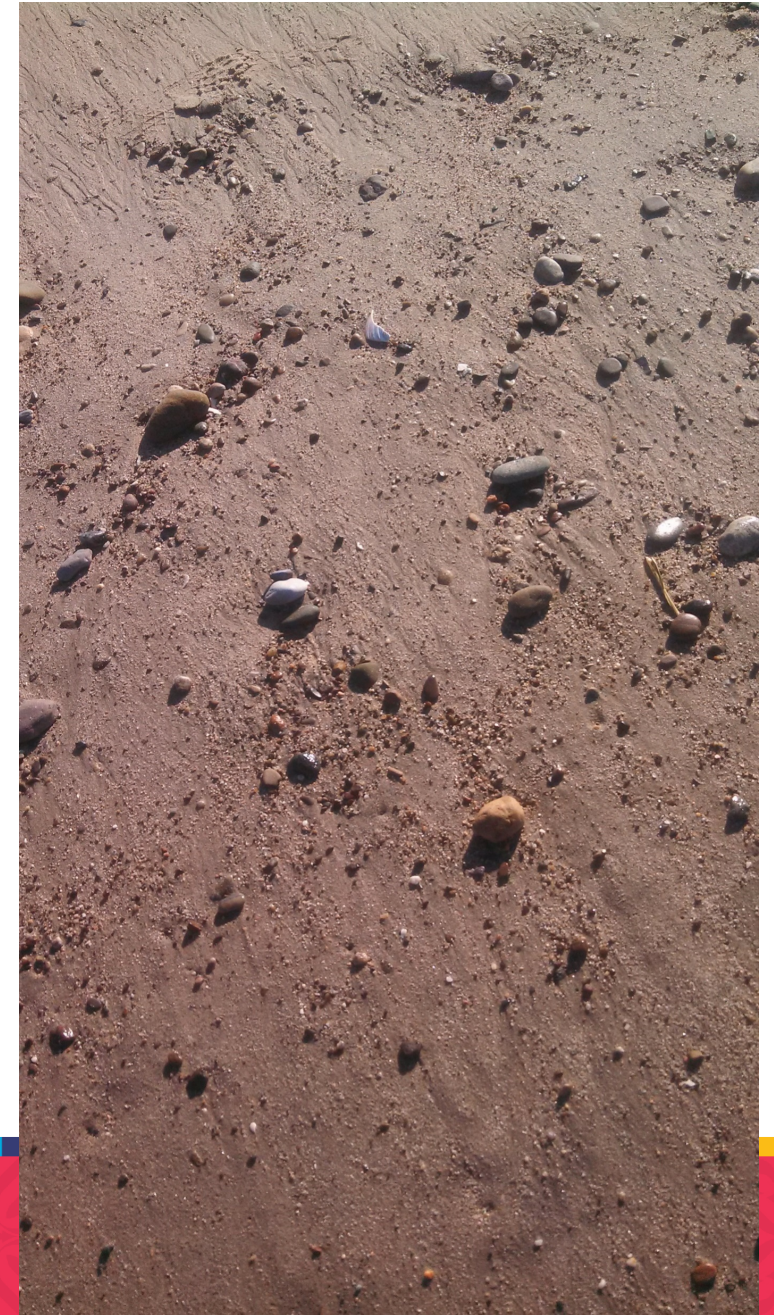




# Conscious Breathing

## Four Part Breathing Technique

- In through the nose at a four count
- Out through the lips at a four count
- In through the nose at a four count
- Out through the lips at a four count
- In through the nose at a four count
- Out through the lips at a four count
- In through the nose at a four count
- Out through the lips at a four count







# Leaning In to the Energy – Learn from Your Hooks





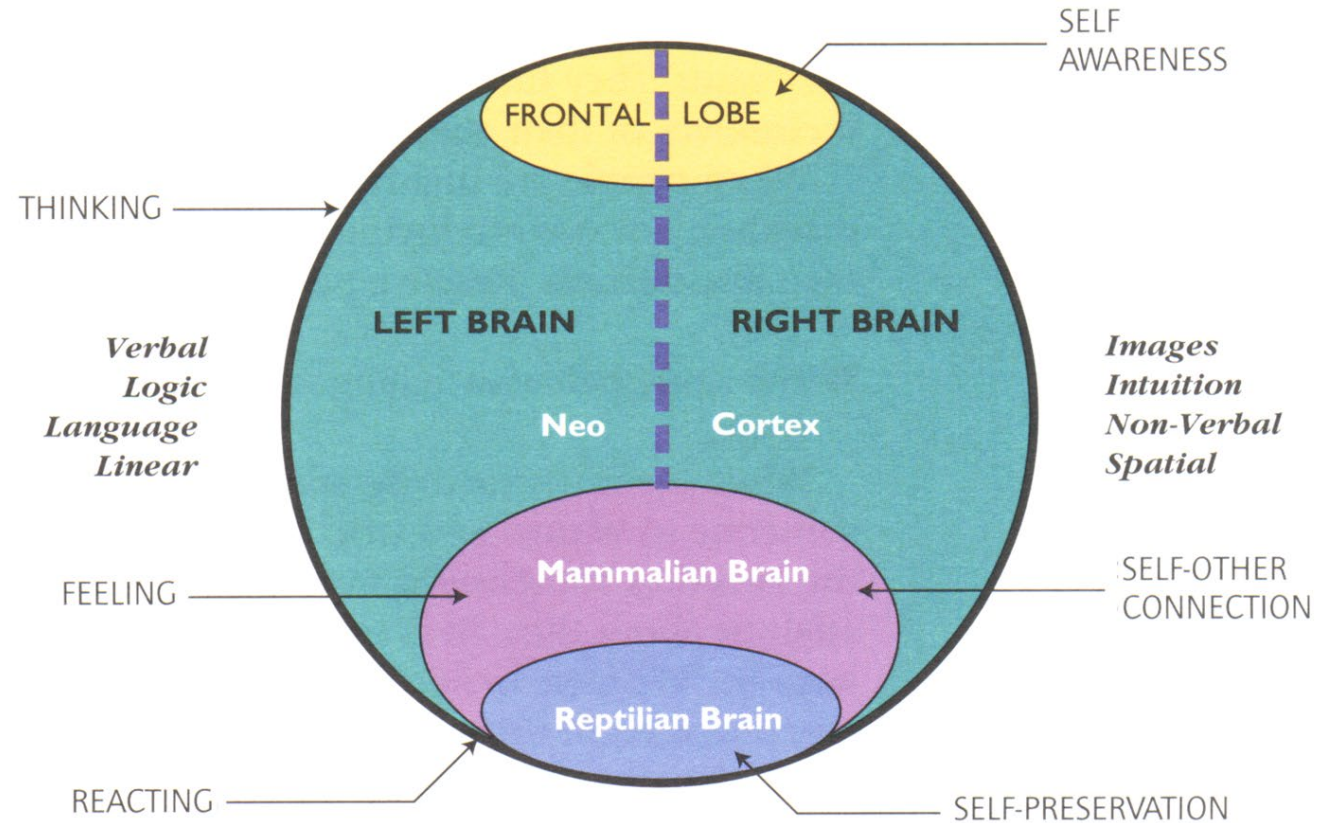
# Practice the Practice – Pick A Hook

- Recognize the Hook
- Feel the Energy (Shenpa)
- Conscious Breathing / Activist Breathing
- “Lean In” to the Energy
- Accept the Charge



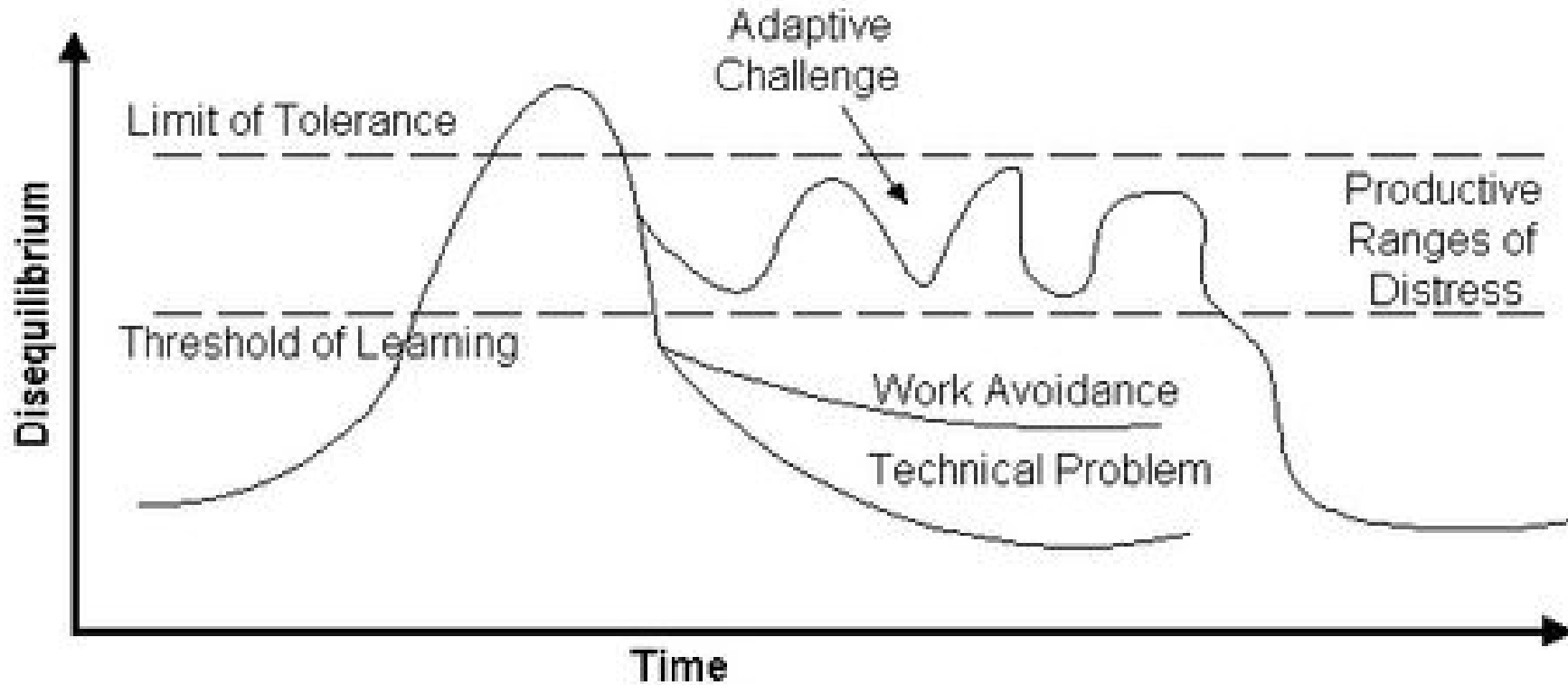


# Anxiety and the Brain – The Nature of Traumatic Stress





# Productive Zone of Disequilibrium



Source: Ronald A. Heifetz and Donald C. Laurie, "Mobilizing Adaptive Work: Beyond Visionary Leadership," in Jay A. Conger, Gretchen M. Spreitzer, and Edward E. Lawler III, eds., *The Leader's Change Handbook: an Essential Guide to Setting Direction and Taking Action* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1998)



# Emergent Pastoral Care – Question Focused Listening

**Emergent Pastoral Care is non-planned Pastoral Care encounters that occur in moments of emotional pain or challenge**

**Emergent Pastoral Care should only be engaged within the community and confines of the congregation**



## **Question Focused Listening**

- A form of listening designed to minimize the input of the listener and maximize the input of the speaker
- Designed to draw from the speaker a facts focused telling of their story
- Seeks to privilege the story of the speaker over any input from the listener
- Draws from the speaker the necessary information to allow for a good hand-off to a primary pastoral care provider



# Inspiration for Question Focused Listening

- My first two Chaplain Assistants, Eric Henningan and Amanda Fuller
- Hospital / Hospice Chaplaincy Residency project to provide clinical guidance for nurses, doctors, and social workers on how to listen to the stories of veterans





# Question Focused Listening

- If the person is actively telling their story to you, just listen!  
Most people need no help.
- If the person needs help telling their story and truth, limit yourself to asking only fact centered clarifying questions:
  - Who were you with?
  - What happened?
  - When did you find out about it?
  - Where were you?
- Keep your questions as short as possible, preferably to just a few words.
- Let them make the meaning... do not try to make it for them.
- Avoid the desire to tell your own story – even if there is connections
- Stick to helping them tell their story, by drawing the story out.



# Question Focused Listening

- If you are confused on the facts of what the speaker is sharing, ask a short, value neutral clarifying question:
  - *“So, were you alone when you found out, or were you with someone?”*
- Be aware of your own tone and body language, seeking to present an image that is compassion-full and values neutral.
- Avoid telling stories of your own, or attempting to offer theological or spiritual responses
  - *This is not because you do not have them, but because this does not result in a short emergent pastoral response.*
- Do not question or challenge any meanings they may share.
  - *Sometimes they will share meanings that you disagree with, or even that you feel are outside Unitarian Universalism. This is not the time and you may not be the person to address such discontinuities.*





# Question Focused Listening

- Share resources for physical needs as appropriate, but only ones that you and your minister have researched
- Know where your “triggers” are, and be prepared if they come up while you listen. If you are triggered, use breathing exercise and return to a fact centered question.
  - > Four count breathing exercise and why it works
- Keep the listening to less than 30 minutes. Bring the listening to a close by setting up a pastoral care handoff or another time to speak:
  - > “Wow... thank you for sharing all that with me. Perhaps this is something we could bring Rev. David into. Or we could talk about it over coffee next week.”



# Listening Exercise

- Form groups of 2
- One person will tell a story about their travel to this meeting
- Other person will ask fact-focused questions and will then close the conversation with a transfer statement
- 5 minutes each
- Who, What, When, Where questions only
- Seek to present as compassion filled and values neutral
- Do not challenge any meanings the speaker may share
- Avoid telling any reciprocal stories or giving advice
- Ask another question to refocus the speaker



# Why This Works

Done well, Question Focused Listening allows the speaker to feel:

- Listened to in a profound way
- Hope in that the emergent encounter ends with a pastoral transfer plan
- An opportunity to do their own meaning making in the moment
- That what is important in the pastoral encounter is them

What Question Focused Listening does for the Lay Pastoral Care Provider:

- A way to control the timeline of an emergent pastoral encounter
- The ability to provide the primary pastoral care with good information
- The comfort of being able to be compassionate while not being expected to match the skill or scope of a professional pastoral care provider



# Managing Yourself Within the Crisis

## Time Management

- There is rarely enough time to engage all of a crisis, trauma, or conflict at the “Thou” level, so do as much as possible at the “We”
- Give yourself permission to let go of the less essential, and imagine before hand what that will be
- Do not sacrifice the time you need to remain healthy in the crisis, trauma, or conflict

## Energy Management

- In crisis, trauma, or conflict, almost everything in the congregation transitions to being a consumer of energy, not a producer
- Make energy space for your own reaction to the crisis, trauma, or conflict
- Increase access to energy producing aspects of your life outside the congregation



# Managing Yourself Within the Crisis

Assess whether the details of the crisis, trauma, or conflict affect your effectiveness as a religious professional in that situation

- For example, if you are an active party to the conflict, you may not be as effective in leading, coordinating, or organizing the response
- It is also possible that you may have personal and professional conflicts that lessen your effectiveness in addressing the response

Be accountable to a colleague during the response

- Religious Professionals on staff
- Other members of your Lay Pastoral Care Team
- Regional Staff
- Other Religious Professional Colleagues and Good Officers
- Be aware of the resources available to you



# Last Minute Questions Before We Close

